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RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 000929

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP (HARRIS)

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [BEXP](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: SAUDI MINISTER OF HEALTH ON H1N1, OTHER HEALTH  
PRIORITIES, MANPOWER NEEDS

REF: RIYADH 901

Classified By: CDA Ambassador Richard Erdman for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

#### SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Saudi Minister of Health Abdullah Rabeeah briefed Charge July 8 on his Ministry's priorities, including preparations for the upcoming Hajj pilgrimage season. Rabeeah requested Embassy assistance delivering a letter to the Centers for Disease Control regarding the distribution of H1N1 testing agents, having had a recent request by the Deputy Health Minister turned down. Rabeeah outlined the Ministry's public health priorities and the Saudi government's vision for health care reform. He requested U.S. assistance to address the need for more and better-trained Saudi health professionals, as well as help to attract U.S. investment in the Kingdom's health sector. Embassy strongly supports the Health Minister's request for additional "H1N1 testing agent" in view of his Ministry's responsibility to limit the health impact of the Hajj, which will bring up to two million foreign pilgrims to the Kingdom this year. End summary.

#### LETTER REGARDING H1N1 DIAGNOSTIC AGENT

2. (C) Health Minister Abdullah Rabeeah asked Charge for Embassy assistance delivering a letter to appropriate counterparts in the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to ensure the most effective distribution of an H1N1 final diagnostic agent (used to test for the virus) in the Kingdom to maximize public health benefits. The new Deputy Minister for Preventive Medicine, who according to the Minister is the only Saudi official authorized to request this agent from the CDC, asked for additional supplies of the diagnostic agent, only to be informed by CDC that the Kingdom's full allotment already had been distributed to several Saudi universities. The Minister emphasized that the CDC should honor only requests that come from the Deputy Minister, especially since the Saudi government desperately will need the materials for diagnostic purposes during the upcoming Hajj when millions of pilgrims arrive in the Kingdom in late November from all over the world.

#### INFECTIOUS DISEASE PRIORITIES

3. (SBU) Regarding President Obama's polio initiative with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Rabeeah said the OIC's successful track record with polio eradication would make it a good partner in joint efforts to eradicate the disease. Rabeeah said his ministry is focused on border programs to help prevent the spread of dengue fever, H1N1,

and malaria. Saudi Arabia's program with Yemen, he said, which provides treatment for infectious diseases 15 to 20 kilometers inside the border, has been hailed by the World Health Organization as a model. On dengue fever during the Hajj, Rabeeah said the Kingdom was planning to replicate in Jeddah the successful prevention program implemented in Mecca, which had reduced new cases from 180 to less than 15 cases per week. He said the Saudi government has committed SR100 million to reduce the estimated 1,500 cases of dengue fever in the Kingdom by ten percent.

#### HEALTH SYSTEM REFORM

14. (SBU) Rabeeah said the Kingdom is working towards a fully integrated health system focused on primary health care, hospital-based care, and automated "E-health" systems. He lauded the role the CDC and Harvard had played in designing the Kingdom's health care model. One lesson was clear, he said, "Privatization of the health care system is not a good option."

#### REQUEST FOR U.S. ASSISTANCE ON MANPOWER AND INVESTMENT

15. (SBU) Rabeeah requested U.S. assistance training medical professionals, noting in particular the Kingdom's shortage of trained nurses. The Charge said the Embassy would work with the Ministry and its U.S. counterparts to facilitate cooperative exchanges. The Ministry is opening a new office of Health Investment and Industry, he said, and would like to attract U.S. investment in the Kingdom's health sector.

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#### COMMENT

16. (C) Rabeeah is under pressure to keep H1N1 from disrupting the Hajj, and we share this goal, which would limit the spread of the virus as potentially infected pilgrims return home to countries all over the world. Health is a major area of potential bilateral cooperation, and we should respond to the Minister's apparent keen interest in working with U.S. institutions in the private and public sectors to the maximum extent possible. End Comment.  
ERDMAN